**APPROVED** MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL

Meeting of September 17, 2020

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

**PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL**

**MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

**Henry I. Bowditch Public Health Council Room, 2nd Floor**

**250 Washington Street, Boston MA**

**Docket: \*\*\*REMOTE MEETING\*\*\* Thursday, September 17, 2020 – 12:00PM**

***Note: The September Public Health Council meeting will be held remotely as a video conference due to the COVID-19 State of Emergency declared by Governor Charles D. Baker on March 10, 2020 and consistent with the Governor’s March 12, 2020 Order modifying the state’s Open Meeting Law and July 2, 2020 Order regarding gatherings.***

Members of the public may listen to the meeting proceedings by using the dial in information below:

Join by Web: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87059419353>

Dial in Telephone Number: +1 646 558 8656

Meeting ID: 870 5941 9353

1. **ROUTINE ITEMS** 
   1. Introductions
   2. Updates from Acting Commissioner Margret Cooke.
   3. Record of the Public Health Council Meeting held August 12, 2020. **(Vote)**
2. **PRESENTATIONS**
   1. Influenza Immunization Update
   2. Update on the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

*The Commissioner and the Public Health Council are defined by law as constituting the Department of Public Health. The Council has one regular meeting per month. These meetings are open to public attendance except when the Council meets in Executive Session. The Council’s meetings are not hearings, nor do members of the public have a right to speak or address the Council. The docket will indicate whether or not floor discussions are anticipated. For purposes of fairness since the regular meeting is not a hearing and is not advertised as such, presentations from the floor may require delaying a decision until a subsequent meeting.*

Public Health Council

Attendance and Summary of Votes:

Presented below is a summary of the meeting, including time-keeping, attendance and votes cast.

Date of Meeting: September 14, 2020

Start Time: 12:11PM Ending Time: 1:10PM

| Board Member | Attended | First Order: Approval of August 12, 2020 Meeting Minutes (Vote) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Acting Commissioner Margret Cooke | Yes | Yes |
| Edward Bernstein | Yes | Yes |
| Lissette Blondet | Yes | Yes |
| Derek Brindisi | Yes | Yes |
| Kathleen Carey | Absent | Absent |
| Sec. Elizabeth Chen | Yes | Yes |
| Harold Cox | Absent | Absent |
| John Cunningham | Yes | Yes |
| Michele David | Absent | Absent |
| Michael Kneeland | Yes | Yes |
| Keith Hovan | Yes | Yes |
| Joanna Lambert | Absent | Absent |
| Acting Secretary Cheryl Poppe | Yes | Yes |
| Lucilia Prates-Ramos | Yes | Yes |
| Summary | 10 Members Present; 4 Absent | 10 Members Approved; 4 Absent |

**PROCEEDINGS**

A regular meeting of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s Public Health Council (M.G.L. c. 17, §§ 1, 3) was held on Thursday, September 17, 2020 by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 250 Washington Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108.

Members present were: Margret Cooke; Edward Bernstein, MD; Lissette Blondet; Derek Brindisi; Secretary Elizabeth Chen; John Cunningham, PhD; Keith Hovan; Michael Kneeland, MD; Acting Secretary Cheryl Poppe; and Lucilia Prates-Ramos.

Also in attendance was Elizabeth Scurria Morgan, Acting General Counsel at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Commissioner Cooke called the meeting to order at 12:11PM and made opening remarks before reviewing the agenda.

**1. ROUTINE ITEMS**

b. Updates from Acting Commissioner Margret Cooke

Commissioner Cooke provided the Council updates on the Commonwealth’s COVID-19 response, arbovirus, and influenza vaccination changes for children and students in Massachusetts. The Commissioner then opened the meeting to the Members for any questions or comments related to her updates.

Mr. Brindisi asked about the role of the Department to support the Governor’s Reopening Task Force, and specifically around restrictions on youth contact supports in light of the state’s positivity rate.

Commissioner Cooke indicated Assistant Commissioner Kevin Cranston will be able to respond later in the meeting.

Seeing no further questions, Commissioner Cooke moved to the next agenda item.

**1. ROUTINE ITEMS**

c. Record of the Public Health Council August 12, 2020 Meeting (Vote).

The Commissioner requested a motion to approve the August PHC minutes.

Lissette Blondet made the motion, which was seconded by Derek Brindisi. All members present approved.

**2. PRESENTATIONS**

Update on the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

Commissioner Cooke then invited Rachel Colchamiro, Director of the Department’s Nutrition Division within the Bureau of Family Health and Nutrition, to present an update on the Department’s WIC Program and response in light of COVID-19.

Upon conclusion of the presentation, Commissioner Cooke opened the meeting to questions from the members.

Secretary Chen asked whether internet access has been a barrier to services and, if so, what the WIC program has done to help with that access..

Ms. Colchamiro noted internet access is not a pre-requisite to receiving services and that all appointments can be conducted by phone. She added that data shows over 90% of families utilize the mobile application for accessing benefits.

Lucilia Prates-Ramos asked about access to services as relates to immigration status.

Ms. Colchamiro indicated WIC participation does not constitute a public charge, and part of the WIC program’s work focuses on emphasizing the privacy of participant information and that programming is welcoming to all and that WIC benefits do not constitute a public charge. She concluded by saying the WIC program does not screen by immigration status prior to receiving any benefits.

Ms. Prates-Ramos asked if there was funding to do a campaign with ethnic media related to public charge and immigration to inform people.

Ms. Colchamiro noted WIC has several campaigns that are designed for multiple communities, with many in both English and Spanish but noted there isn’t a campaign specific to public charge at this time.

Ms. Prates-Ramos noted that several community groups serve individuals that may be eligible to enroll in WIC.

Ms. Colchamiro noted the program does monitor those sites.

Ms. Prates-Ramos noted the Office of Refugees and Immigrants may be a resource.

Ms. Colchamiro noted the WIC Program does have a relationship with that Office.

Secretary Poppe asked if there was any aggregate information on the number of families served who are veterans or military families.

Ms. Colchamiro indicated while WIC does not collect information on military or veteran status, she did note that the WIC Program does have relationships with military bases and serve coast guard families.

**2. PRESENTATIONS**

Influenza immunization update

With no other questions, Acting Commissioner Cooke thanked Ms. Colchamiro for her presentation and invited Pejman Talebian, Director of the Department’s Immunization Program within the Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences, to present on influenza vaccination in Massachusetts.

Mr. Brindisi asked what the Department is hearing as far as community pushback and if it will affect access to school.

Mr. Talebian indicated we have gotten some pushback, including groups opposed to vaccinations generally, but that overall the feedback from school nurses, local health departments, and parents has been supportive of the mandate.

Mr. Brindisi then asked about the Department’s efforts and plans for flu vaccination this season and if with enhanced vaccination and use of masks if we’d expect lower rates of flu infection.

Mr. Talebian indicated we aren’t able to predict that, but the lower hemisphere did see lower rates of flu, and hope that translates. He added that enhanced vaccination and masks could impact the prevalence of flu in Massachusetts.

Mr. Brindisi then asked Kevin Cranston, Assistant Commissioner and Director for the Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences, about the Department’s role in the Governor’s Reopening Task Force specifically around youth sports as relates to low positivity rates. Mr. Brindisi highlighted the impact on urban youth.

Mr. Cranston responded that the Department acted as a public health resource to the task force, and advised not only on what should reopen but also how to reopen safely and cautiously. He added that in New England there have been youth and adult sporting events with clusters of transmission and that having low rates in and of themselves are a function of how the Administration has approached the COVID-19 response and that we need to be thoughtful and evidence-based in making any other changes to the reopening structure.

Mr. Brindisi countered with some of the other negative consequences restrictions have created, such as youth violence and unintentional injury potentially due to youth not having an outlet.

Mr. Cranston responded that the Task Force weighs public health in the context of other considerations as well.

Assistant Commissioner Cooke added that there is an outlet for communities to offer their thoughts or concerns with the reopening and provided the web address to Mr. Brindisi.

At the conclusion of questions, Commissioner Cooke reminded the Council the next meeting would be October 14, 2020 at 9AM, and asked members if there was a motion to adjourn.

Secretary Chen made the motion, which was seconded by Ms. Prates-Ramos; all in attendance approved.

The meeting adjourned at 1:10PM.